



Suriname

Country Reports on Human Rights Practices - [2004](#)

Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor
February 28, 2005

Suriname is a constitutional democracy, with a president elected by the unicameral legislature. After generally free and fair elections in May 2000, the New Front, a coalition of 4 parties, won 33 seats in the 51-member National Assembly and, in August 2000, elected Ronald Venetiaan of the National Party of Suriname (NPS), 1 of the coalition members, as President. Venetiaan previously served as President from 1991 to 1996. The judiciary, although extremely inefficient, was independent.

The armed forces are responsible for national security and border control, with the military police having direct responsibility for immigration control at the country's ports-of-entry. All elements of the military were under the control of the Minister of Defense. Civilian police bore primary responsibility for the maintenance of law and order and reported to the Ministry of Justice and Police. The Government continued to implement Operation Safe Suriname, a predominantly police-led operation to maintain security in and around the capital, as well as in remote communities near large commercial enterprises. The influence of former dictator Desi Bouterse within the military has declined steadily since 2000, although he still retained influence with some military officers. The civilian authorities maintained effective control of the security forces. A few members of the security forces committed isolated human rights abuses.

The economy is market-based, with strong government participation; the Government and state-owned companies employed over half the working population. The population was approximately 480,000. The economy depended heavily on the export of bauxite derivatives. Unregulated gold mining was an increasingly important economic activity that highlighted a lack of land rights for indigenous and tribal people and lack of government control of the interior. Estimated gross domestic product grew by approximately 4.1 percent. By year's end, the inflation rate was estimated at 10 percent, compared with 25 percent in 2003. Civil servants received two 5 percent salary increases during the year, while salary increases by state-owned and private companies varied from 5 to 10 percent. An estimated 50 to 60 percent of families lived below the poverty line.

The Government generally respected the human rights of its citizens; however, there were problems in some areas. Police mistreated detainees, specifically at the time of arrest; guards abused prisoners; and local detention facilities remained overcrowded. The judiciary suffered from ineffectiveness and a huge case backlog due to the shortage of judges, which resulted in lengthy pretrial detention. Self-censorship by some media continued. Societal discrimination against women, minorities, and indigenous people persisted. Violence against women continued, and while the Government took steps to combat trafficking in persons, trafficking in women and underage girls and boys remained a problem.

RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

Section 1 Respect for the Integrity of the Person, Including Freedom From:

a. Arbitrary or Unlawful Deprivation of Life

There were reports of the arbitrary or unlawful deprivation of life committed by the Government or its agents. In May, two police officers shot and killed a defenseless suspect. The two officers were arrested, and an investigation remained pending at year's end. In two other cases of fatal shootings by police officers, investigations vindicated the officers.

The Government still did not address past abuses, which continued to be a focus of concern. The Government did not investigate the 1986 massacre of more than 50 civilians at the village of Moiwana. In 1997, the nongovernmental organization (NGO) Moiwana '86, established as a watchdog on this and other human rights issues, took the case to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) and subsequently forwarded the case to the Inter-American Court on Human Rights after receiving no response from the Government. In September the Court heard the matter, and a decision was pending at year's end.

The investigation into the 1982 killings by the Bouterse regime of 15 prominent political, labor, business, and media leaders, ordered in 2000 by the Court of Justice, continued throughout the year. A list of more than 30 suspects, drawn up at the start of the investigation, with Bouterse as the prime suspect, was reduced to less than 10. At mid-year, the Prosecutor's Office declared

the investigation completed, and local officials stated that the case would likely be tried in 2005.

b. Disappearance

There were no reports of politically motivated disappearances; however, the Government had yet to investigate allegations of certain disappearances that occurred between 1983 and 1991.

c. Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment

The Constitution prohibits inhuman treatment or punishment; however, human rights groups continued to express concern about official mistreatment and documented cases of police mistreatment of detainees, particularly during arrests, and abuse of prisoners by prison officials.

Human rights activists accused the police of using excessive force during arrests. There were reports that police shot and wounded five suspects, including armed dangerous criminals, during arrests. In January, police officers severely beat a suspect, who was taken to a doctor for medical treatment. As a result of investigation by the Police Personnel Investigation Department (OPZ), the officers received a disciplinary punishment.

Through November, citizens filed 166 complaints with the OPZ, the majority of which were for physical mistreatment (see Section 1.d.). The authorities arrested 18 officers and disciplined 105 for various offenses, including brutality; 19 officers were incarcerated, 32 were suspended, and 5 were fired. According to human rights groups, inadequate training of police officers serving as the jailers at local detention facilities contributed to the abuses.

Prison conditions were poor and, in many cases, did not meet international standards. There were three prisons and several detention facilities at police stations where detainees were held before appearing before a judge to be charged or to stand trial. Human rights monitors expressed concern about conditions in the prisons, particularly in local detention facilities, which remained overcrowded. At police stations, prison officials allowed detainees no exercise and rarely permitted them to leave their cells. Detainees and human rights groups also complained about inadequate meals. At mid-year, security concerns prompted prison officials to limit access by families to bring food, raising protests from the incarcerated. There generally was no consideration given to persons requiring a specific diet for religious reasons. Human rights monitors reported that guards mistreated detainees and that medical care and living conditions were inadequate.

Violence among prisoners was common, and the authorities generally did not punish prisoners for violence against other prisoners. Most facilities, especially older jails, remained unsanitary and seriously overcrowded, with as many as four times the number of detainees for which they were designed. In May, a government commission, installed in 2003 to investigate treatment of detainees in prison facilities, presented its report to the Justice Minister. The commission recommended renovating all prison facilities and--to lessen overcrowding--an adjustment of the police detainment policy, such as releasing those charged with lesser crimes after their statements were taken.

Male and female prisoners were held separately. Conditions in women's jail and prison facilities were generally better than those in the men's facilities. There was no separate facility for girls under the age of 18; girls were held in the women's detention center and in the women's section of one of the prison complexes.

Juvenile facilities for both boys and girls between the ages of 10 and 18 within the adult prison were considered adequate and included educational and recreational facilities. There was a separate wing of an adult prison for boys under age 18 who committed serious crimes, where recreational facilities were more limited. A steadily growing number of persons who already have been convicted but not yet placed in prisons, due to a lack of space in prison facilities, continued to be held in police custody or pretrial detention cells.

Moiwana '86 monitored the conditions of prisoners. Representatives of the group reported that, in general, they had access to prisoners and received cooperation from prison officials on routine matters.

d. Arbitrary Arrest or Detention

The Constitution prohibits arbitrary arrest and detention, and the Government generally observed these prohibitions; however, prisoners who appealed their cases often served their full sentences due to the lengthy appeals process resulting from the lack of judges. The Attorney General's Office reiterated its concern that prisoners who served their original sentence were not released on a timely basis. Defense lawyers often utilized an article of the Code of Criminal Proceedings that allows a judge to release a suspect if the case against the accused appears weak.

The police force (Korps Politie Suriname) has approximately 1,200 police officers and 350 civilians and is divided into 4 departments: Judicial (intelligence, forensics, fraud, narcotics, investigative), general, Paramaribo, and interior (outside of Paramaribo). Police effectiveness was hampered by a lack of equipment and training, low salaries, and poor coordination with other law enforcement agencies. Police conducted limited joint operations with the military in areas of the country that lacked a police presence. Corruption remained a problem, and senior officers met monthly with the Attorney General's Office to review

corruption and other cases against the police. The OPZ investigated more than 100 complaints against officers and made recommendations on whether an officer should be punished internally or if criminal charges should be brought.

Individuals were apprehended with warrants and were promptly informed about the charges against them. The police may detain for investigation for up to 16 days a person suspected of committing a crime for which the sentence is longer than 4 years, and an assistant district attorney or a police inspector may authorize incommunicado detention. The police must bring the accused before a prosecutor to be charged formally in that period, but, if additional time is needed to investigate the charge, a prosecutor and later a judge of instruction may extend the detention period an additional 150 days. The average length of pretrial detention was 30 to 45 days for lesser crimes. Detainees were often held in overcrowded detention cells at local police stations. There is no bail system. Detainees were allowed prompt access to counsel of their choosing, but the prosecutor may prohibit access if he thinks that this could harm the investigation. In practice, the courts freed detainees who were not tried within the 164-day period, in accordance with the law. Defendants enjoyed a presumption of innocence.

There were no reports of political detainees.

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

The Constitution provides for an independent judiciary; however, disputes over the appointment of judges to the bench undermined the independence of the judiciary in recent years. The President had yet to confirm the Acting Attorney General, who has served in that position (which has lifetime tenure) since 2000. In addition, the President had yet to appoint a president of the Court of Justice; the acting president has also occupied his position since 2000. The judiciary was significantly hampered by a shortage of judges, which limited the effectiveness of the civilian and military courts. There were only seven permanent judges and five deputy judges, some of whom served part-time, for the entire country, a number that human rights groups and lawyers associations widely viewed as inadequate.

The judicial system consisted of three lower courts, two specialized courts, and the Court of Justice as an appeals court. Although the Constitution calls for the establishment of an independent constitutional court, the National Assembly has not created such a court due to concerns that it would have the authority to overturn government decisions. Other problems the judiciary faced included financial dependency on the Ministry of Justice and Police (and hence the executive branch), lack of professional court managers and case management systems to oversee the courts' administrative functions, and lack of space. These obstacles caused a significant case backlog. The courts required a minimum of 6 months to process criminal cases, and civil cases were resolved approximately 3 to 4 years after being heard by the courts.

The Constitution provides for the right to a fair, public trial in which defendants have the right to counsel. There is no jury system. The courts assign private sector lawyers to defend indigent prisoners, paying the costs from public funds. However, court-assigned lawyers, of whom there were 14, generally appeared at the trial without prior consultation with defendants. According to Moiwana '86, these lawyers often did not appear at all. Detainees have the right to a prompt judicial determination of the legality of their detention, and this was respected in practice.

Military personnel generally are not subject to civilian criminal law. A member of the armed forces accused of a crime immediately comes under military jurisdiction, and military police are responsible for all such investigations. Military prosecutions are directed by an officer on the public prosecutor's staff and take place in separate courts before two military judges and one civilian judge. The military courts follow the same rules of procedure as the civil courts. There is no appeal from the military to the civil system.

There were no reports of political prisoners.

f. Arbitrary Interference with Privacy, Family, Home, or Correspondence

The Constitution prohibits such actions, and the Government generally respected these prohibitions in practice. The law requires warrants, which are issued by quasi-judicial officers who supervise criminal investigations, for searches. The police obtained them in the great majority of investigations.

Section 2 Respect for Civil Liberties, Including:

a. Freedom of Speech and Press

The Constitution provides for freedom of speech and of the press, and the Government generally respected these rights in practice and did not restrict academic freedom.

Some media members continued to practice occasional self-censorship, due to a history of intimidation and reprisals by certain elements of the former military leadership and to pressure by senior government officials and other important community leaders on journalists publishing negative or unflattering stories about the administration.

There were 4 daily newspapers, 14 television stations, and approximately 25 radio stations. Two television stations and two

radio stations were publicly owned. Three companies, one owned publicly, provided cable television, which included foreign channels.

Unlike the previous year, journalists and media entities were free from harassing lawsuits by public figures.

The Government did not restrict access to the Internet.

b. Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association

The Constitution provides for freedom of assembly and association, and the Government generally respected these rights in practice.

c. Freedom of Religion

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice.

For a more detailed discussion, see the [2004 International Religious Freedom Report](#).

d. Freedom of Movement Within the Country, Foreign Travel, Emigration, and Repatriation

The Constitution and the law provide for these rights, and the Government generally respected them in practice.

The Constitution does not address exile; however, it was not used in practice.

The law does not provide for the granting of asylum or refugee status in accordance with the 1951 U.N. Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees or its 1967 Protocol, and the Government has not established a system for providing protection to refugees. Under special circumstances, persons may be granted refugee status, and, in practice, the Government provided protection against refoulement, the return of persons to a country where they feared persecution. During the year, the Government did not grant asylum or refugee status.

The Government cooperated with the office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees and other humanitarian organizations in assisting refugees and asylum seekers.

Section 3 Respect for Political Rights: The Right of Citizens to Change Their Government

The Constitution provides citizens with the right to change their government peacefully, and citizens exercised this right in practice through regularly scheduled, free, and fair elections held on the basis of universal suffrage; however, in its 29 years of independence, the country has experienced two military coups, 7 years of military rule, and one instance in which massive public demonstrations forced an agreement to hold elections a year early.

The Constitution stipulates that power and authority rest with the citizens and provides for direct election by secret ballot of the 51-member National Assembly every 5 years. The National Assembly in turn elects the President by a two-thirds majority vote. If the legislature is unable to do so, as was the case both in the 1991 and 1996 national elections, the Constitution provides that a national people's assembly, composed of Members of Parliament and regional and local officials, shall elect the President.

The law allows early elections with the concurrence of both the National Assembly and the President. In May 1999, widespread street demonstrations triggered by the declining economy forced the Government of then-President Wijdenbosch to call early elections, which were held in May 2000. After those elections, which observers considered to be generally free and fair, the National Assembly elected NPS leader Ronald Venetiaan as President in August 2000.

The Constitution provides for the organization and functioning of political parties. Various parties and two political coalitions were represented in the National Assembly. President Venetiaan formed his cabinet from members of the New Front coalition, comprised of the NPS, a predominantly Creole party; the Progressive Reform Party, a predominantly Hindustani party; the Suriname Labor Party, a political wing of the largest labor union; and Pertjaja Luhur, a predominantly Javanese party.

Corruption of government officials remained a problem; however, the Government prosecuted former Finance and Natural Resource Minister Errol Alibux for embezzlement. Alibux, who was convicted in absentia for corruption in November 2003, returned to the country and surrendered to law enforcement authorities in January. He contested the Court of Justice verdict against him (a 1-year prison term and 3-year bar from public office) via the Inter-American Human Rights Commission, since the Court of Justice is the highest court in the country, and he had no venue for appeal. The appeal was pending at year's end.

Laws provide for public access to government information, and almost every Ministry has an information service; however, access to government information was limited in practice.

Historical and cultural factors, such as early, arranged marriages for Hindu and Muslim women, impeded equal participation by women in leadership positions in government and political parties. In the past, participation by women in politics (and other fields) generally was considered inappropriate. While women made limited gains in attaining political power in recent years, political circles remained under the influence of traditional male-dominated groups, and women were disadvantaged in seeking high public office. There were 10 women in the 51-seat National Assembly, and a woman was Vice Chairperson of the National Assembly. The Cabinet included three women--Minister of Foreign Affairs, Minister of Internal Affairs, and Deputy Minister of Social Affairs. In 2001, the first woman judge joined the Court of Justice.

The Constitution prohibits racial and religious discrimination; however, several factors limited the participation of Maroons (descendants of escaped slaves who fled to the interior to avoid recapture) and Amerindians in the political process. Most of the country's political activity takes place in the capital, Paramaribo, and a narrow belt running east and west of it along the coast. The Maroons and Amerindians were concentrated in remote areas in the interior and therefore had limited access to, and influence on, the political process. There were three Maroon and one Amerindian political parties. In 2000, voters elected eight Maroons and one Amerindian to the National Assembly. There were no Maroons or Amerindians in the Cabinet.

Section 4 Governmental Attitude Regarding International and Nongovernmental Investigation of Alleged Violations of Human Rights

A number of domestic and international human rights groups, such as Organization for Justice and Peace, Foundation "Know Your Rights," and Moiwana '86, generally operated without government restriction, investigating and publishing their findings on human rights cases; however, government officials generally were not cooperative or responsive to their views.

Section 5 Discrimination, Societal Abuses, and Trafficking in Persons

The Constitution and laws, with the exception of certain ethnic marriage laws, do not differentiate among citizens on the basis of their ethnic origins, religious affiliations, or other cultural differences. However, in practice, several societal groups, including Maroons, Amerindians, and homosexuals, suffered various forms of discrimination. Societal discrimination against persons with HIV/AIDS also continued. Hospital workers and other health professionals were reluctant to treat infected persons.

Women

Violence against women was a common problem, which the Government had not addressed specifically. The law does not differentiate between domestic violence and other forms of assault. According to a national women's NGO, Stop Violence Against Women, victims continued to report cases of violence against women and complained of an inadequate response from the Government and society to what appeared to be a trend of increasing family violence. Police received more than 700 reports of domestic violence during the year. In 2002, Stop Violence Against Women, which received reports of approximately 300 abuse cases during the year, stated that of the approximately 300 women reporting abuse most were married, between the ages of 25 and 50, had 2 to 3 children, and were employed in a low-paying job. Although the police were reluctant to intervene in instances of domestic violence, a national women's group noted that police attitudes had improved. There were victims' rooms in police stations in Nickerie and Paramaribo to provide better services to crime victims. There was no domestic violence hotline.

The law prohibits non-spousal rape. The police reported 59 cases of non-spousal rape during the first 9 months of the year. The public prosecutor's office estimated that approximately 15 rape cases were concluded during the year, with sentences ranging between 5 months' and 5 years' imprisonment.

The law prohibits sexual exploitation, including prostitution; however, in practice, prostitution generally was tolerated. In December, concerns about the link between prostitution and trafficking in persons resulted in raids on commercial sex locations and arrests of prostitutes. Poverty continued to put young women at risk of becoming prostitutes. The presence of large groups of illegal miners in the gold mining sector in the interior drew many young Maroon women into prostitution. Police allowed many brothel-type establishments to operate, and officials asserted that they made random checks on the brothels twice a month to see if women were being abused, held against their will, or having their passports retained by brothel owners to ensure fulfillment of work contract obligations (see Section 5, Trafficking).

Various laws were used to prosecute perpetrators of sexual harassment, and several cases of sexual abuse against minors came to trial. The Youth Police reported more than 25 cases of sexual abuse against minor; 13 cases came to trial, resulting in sentences averaging 3 years in prison.

Women have the legal right to equal access to education, employment, and property; nevertheless, social pressures and customs, especially in rural areas, inhibited their full exercise of these rights, particularly with respect to marriage and inheritance. Social pressures on families to have their daughters married at or near the legal age of marriage consent frequently interfered with the girls' education and resulted in the direct passage of all property the women would have inherited from their parents to their husband and parents-in-law in accordance with these customs. Women experienced economic discrimination in access to employment and in rates of pay for the same or substantially similar work. A 2002 report showed that approximately 88 percent of women were employed in entry-level positions, 9 percent had mid-level jobs, and 3 percent held management positions. More than 60 percent of women worked in traditionally female administrative or secretarial jobs. The Government did not make specific efforts to combat economic discrimination.

The National Gender Bureau in the Ministry of Internal Affairs prepared an Integral Gender Action plan for 2000-2005; however, financial and staffing constraints greatly limited its effectiveness. The principal concerns of women's groups were political representation, economic vulnerability, violence, and discrimination.

The National Women's Movement, the most active women's rights NGO, continued assisting women with launching small home-based businesses, such as sewing and growing vegetables, and provided general legal help. Women's Business Group advocated business opportunities for women, while Women's Parliament advocated opportunities in the public sector. Stop Violence Against Women provided assistance to victims of domestic violence, including legal help with dissolving an abusive marriage. The Maxi Linder Foundation worked with commercial sex trade workers, including women and children who were victims of trafficking, and conducted outreach and informational sessions to inform victims of human rights abuses about their rights. Resource constraints continued to limit the effectiveness of these groups.

Children

The Government allocated limited resources to ensure safeguards for the human rights and welfare of children. Schooling is compulsory until 12 years of age, although some school-age children did not have access to education due to a lack of transportation, building facilities, or teachers. School attendance was free; however, most public schools imposed a nominal enrollment fee, ranging from \$10 to \$35 (SRD 25 to SRD 100) a year to cover costs. Approximately 85 percent of children in cities attended school; children in the interior did not receive the same level of education as those in the city, and as few as 50 percent actually attended school. There was no legal difference in the treatment of girls and boys in education or health care services, and, in practice, both were treated equally. Children faced increasing economic pressure to discontinue their education to seek employment (see Section 6.d.).

Unlike in the past, there were no reports of malnutrition among poor children. There were several orphanages and one privately funded shelter for sexually abused children in the capital, where more than 50 percent of the country's population was concentrated. Elsewhere, distressed children usually relied on the resources of their extended families.

Government medical care for children was generally adequate, and vaccination for all children was obligatory. However, the Government offered very limited mental health care. An NGO, The Bureau for Child Development, provided mental health care for abused children. There was a home for HIV/AIDS orphans and abandoned children in Paramaribo.

There was no societal pattern of abuse directed against children; however, some children were sexually abused. The legal age of sexual consent is 14; however, it was not enforced strictly. In March, the National Assembly adjusted the Asian Marriage Law to raise the age of marriage consent from 13 to 15 for Asian girls and 15 to 17 for Asian boys, provided parents of the parties agree to the marriage. The age of marriage consent for all other (non-Asian) Surinamers remains at 18 with parental permission, and the permission requirement applies to all individuals up to age 30. The law also mandated the presence of a Civil Registry official to register all marriages.

Trafficking and commercial sex exploitation of minors remained a problem (see Section 5, Trafficking). The Salvation Army and a Catholic charitable organization provided shelter for homeless boys.

Trafficking In Persons

No comprehensive trafficking in persons law exists, but statutes that apply only to women and children prohibit "white slavery," migrant smuggling, and pimping. In practice, these statutes were rarely enforced, and trafficking in persons, including for sexual exploitation, remained a problem. The Police Criminal Law prohibits solicitation, but the law was not enforced. The Government's Anti-trafficking Commission had primary responsibility for combating trafficking; the Commission included representatives from law enforcement (Attorney General's Office and the Military Police, which handles immigration), the ministries of Justice and Police, Labor, Defense, and Foreign Affairs, and the Maxi Linder Foundation. The Commission submitted a proposal to the Minister of Justice and Police in November to bring current legislation in accordance with international anti-trafficking standards.

There were reports of trafficking of women and girls to, through, and within the country for prostitution. Several commercial sex trade establishments in the capital reportedly recruited Brazilian, Colombian, Dominican, Guyanese, and Chinese women for prostitution. There also were reports of underage Hindustani and Maroon girls and Javanese and Hindustani boys trafficked within the country for prostitution by recruiters or caretakers. The police had informal agreements with many brothel owners allowing them to proceed with their business. However, police conducted random checks to ensure that women were not mistreated, that no minors were present, and that owners did not keep the women's airline tickets and passports. During the year, there were fewer than 10 reports of brothel owners retaining passports and airline tickets to uphold contract obligations. In such cases, the police assisted these women to return to their country of origin at their own expense. There were no trafficking convictions during the year; however, on December 10, the police arrested the Deputy District Commissioner of the district of Nieuw Nickerie for trafficking four young Guyanese women into the country for prostitution. The commissioner allegedly enticed the women, one of whom was underage, with promises of employment as restaurant waitresses but, upon their arrival, forced them to work as prostitutes. At year's end, he remained in detention pending a hearing in his case. There were also reports that persons were trafficked to work in Chinese restaurants and supermarkets.

The Public Prosecutor's Office and the police established a registry of all brothels and their employees by nationality. The Public

Prosecutor's Office, in cooperation with police officials, extended services provided to victims of domestic violence to possible trafficked victims and, in May, established a "special victims' unit" and a telephone hotline to handle all cases from the commercial sex industry. The Maxi Linder Foundation continued assisting trafficking victims in the commercial sex industry. Police cooperated with Curacao and Guyana law enforcement on three trafficking in persons cases.

In November, the Anti-trafficking Commission, with the approval of the Minister of Justice and Police, issued a National Action Plan to combat trafficking in persons and two operations manuals on identifying and prosecuting trafficking, one for police and another for immigration. In December, pursuant to the plan, the Minister of Justice and Police created a Special Police Unit to conduct investigations and raids. Police raids on brothels and informal commercial sex locations resulted in the deportation of several prostitutes. Other steps outlined in the plan included instituting a system of checks for visa adjudications and preventing trafficking through informational campaigns. Success in implementing these was not yet clear at year's end.

On February 24, the popular radio and television station ABC began running public education programming aimed at combating trafficking in persons. In early March, ABC held two 1-hour television and radio interviews with government and NGO representatives to discuss trafficking issues. On October 27-28, an International Organization for Migration program in Paramaribo focused on preventing trafficking in persons and assisting its victims. The program targeted an audience of approximately 30 government officials. In November and December, the country's two leading newspapers published articles on trafficking in persons that quoted senior public officials.

Persons with Disabilities

There were no laws concerning persons with disabilities, no provisions for making private or public buildings accessible to them, nor any laws mandating that they be given equal consideration when seeking jobs or housing. Some training programs were provided for the blind and others with disabilities. In general, persons with disabilities suffered from discrimination when applying for jobs and services.

National/Racial/Ethnic Minorities

The law prohibits discrimination on the basis of race or ethnicity, and no discrimination complaints were filed during the year; however, Maroons, who numbered approximately 10 percent of the population, continued to be disadvantaged in the areas of education, employment, and government services. Most Maroons lived in the interior, where limited infrastructure narrowed their access to educational and professional opportunities and health and social services. Maroons in Paramaribo suffered from negative social stereotypes. In a March report to the U.N. High Commission for Human Rights, the Government stated that employers did not discriminate against Maroons and that Maroons (as well as Amerindians) were consulted when rights to their traditional agricultural and hunting lands were granted to various concessionaires. The report did acknowledge logistical and financial difficulties the Government faced in providing education to populations spread out over large distances and conceded the need to do more to address health and environmental concerns linked to gold mining, such as mercury contamination.

The start of official gold mining activities by the Gross Rosebel Goldmines Company raised protests in June and July from neighboring Maroon villages regarding the company's recruitment policy and competition for land rights for their own mining activity. The Maroon residents blocked roads to the mining operations and commandeered a bus carrying company workers, who were later released unharmed. The police restored order, and no one was arrested.

Indigenous People

The Constitution affords no special protection for, or recognition of, indigenous people. Most Amerindians (about 3 percent of the population) suffered a number of disadvantages and had only limited ability to participate in decisions affecting their lands, cultures, traditions, and natural resources. The country's political life, educational opportunities, and jobs were concentrated in the capital and its environs, while the majority of Amerindians (as well as Maroons) lived in the interior. Government services in the interior were largely unavailable, and much of the infrastructure was destroyed during the 1986-92 interior war; progress in reestablishing services and rebuilding the infrastructure was very slow. Following demonstrations in 2001 by veterans of the Jungle Commando, who played a large role in the insurgencies, their de facto leader Ronny Brunswijk and the Minister of Regional Development agreed to schedule quarterly meetings to monitor implementation of the 2001 Lelydorp Accord. Official and informal meetings between the involved parties continued without substantive results. During the year, the Government integrated 10 former Jungle Commando members into the police but had not implemented the native land rights portion of the agreement. The Government's March report to the U.N. High Commission on Human Rights described actions taken to protect the rights of Amerindians and Maroons, as well as areas for improvement (see Section 5, Minorities). The Government proclaimed the U.N.'s International Indigenous Day a holiday.

The Amerindian (and Maroon) populations continued to face problems with illegal and uncontrolled logging and mining.

Organizations representing Maroon and Amerindian communities complained that small-scale mining operations, mainly by illegal gold miners, dug trenches that cut residents off from their agricultural land and threatened to drive them away from their traditional settlements. Mercury runoff from these operations also contaminated and threatened traditional food source areas.

In 2000, the Vereniging van Saramakaanse Gezagdragers, an organization representing 12 Saramaccaner clans with authority

over 60 villages in the Upper Suriname River area of central Suriname, filed a petition with the IACHR claiming that lumber operations, mostly by Chinese-owned concessions, threatened their way of life. The IACHR heard the case, and its decision remained pending at year's end. The concessionaries ceased their activities. Meanwhile, the Government granted permission to a Chinese company to start a palm-oil factory in the district of Marowijne in the eastern part of the country. The company also received permission for large-scale logging in concessions around the factory. The Maroon communities in the vicinity of the factory protested and threatened to use violence if the Chinese began logging activities; however, a government-established interagency committee mediated, urging acceptance of the deal, since the company would hire local workers. In December, the company and the interagency committee reached agreement for logging to begin within 3 months. Human rights and environmental groups continued monitoring the joint venture activities of SURALCO and BHP Billiton, which were exploring the possibility of mining bauxite and generating hydropower in the western part of the country.

Maroon and Amerindian groups continued to cooperate with each other in an effort to exercise their rights more effectively.

Other Societal Abuses

The law prohibits discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation; however, homosexuals continued to suffer from employment discrimination. Persons with HIV/AIDS continued to experience societal discrimination in employment and medical services.

Section 6 Worker Rights

a. The Right of Association

The Constitution protects the right of workers to associate and to choose their representatives democratically. Nearly 60 percent of the work force was organized into unions, and most unions belonged to one of the country's six major labor federations. Unions were independent of the Government but played an active role in politics.

b. The Right to Organize and Bargain Collectively

The Constitution recognizes the right to organize and bargain collectively, and the authorities generally respected this right in practice. Collective bargaining agreements covered approximately 50 percent of the labor force. There are no export processing zones.

The Constitution provides for the right to strike, and workers in both public and private sectors exercised this right in practice.

c. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor

The Constitution prohibits forced or compulsory labor, including by children; however, a local NGO reported that child prostitution existed (see Section 5).

d. Prohibition of Child Labor and Minimum Age for Employment

The law sets the minimum age for employment at 14 years and restricts working hours for minors to day shifts but does not specify the length of such day shifts. Children younger than 18 are prohibited from doing hazardous work, defined as work dangerous to their life, health, and decency; and those younger than 14 are only allowed to work in a family or special vocational setting or for educational purpose. However, the Ministry of Labor and the police enforced this law only sporadically, and child labor remained a problem in the informal sector.

Children under 14 worked as street vendors, newspaper sellers, rice and lumber mill workers, packers for traders, or shop assistants. Working hours for youths were not limited in comparison with the regular work force. Employers in these sectors did not guarantee work safety, and children often worked barefoot and without protective gloves, with no access to medical care. Although government figures reported that only 2 percent of children were economically active, a 2002 survey conducted by the Institute for Training and Research found that 50 percent of children between the ages of 4 and 14 were economically active, working mainly in the informal sector. The worst forms of child labor, such as prostitution, remained a problem; there were reports of abuse of commercial sexual exploitation of children and teens by caretakers and older recruiters (see Section 5). In June, the country ratified International Labor Convention 182 on the elimination of the worst forms of child labor.

The Ministry of Labor's Department of Labor Inspection, with about 30 inspectors, has responsibility to implement and enforce the labor laws, including those pertaining to the worst forms of child labor. Staff shortages limited the extent and frequency of labor inspections; inspectors performed approximately 10 inspections per day, concentrated in the greater capital area and in the western district of Nickerie, where most of the population lives. The Government did not investigate exploitative child labor cases outside urban areas. An estimated total of 450 inspections were performed during the year, with none resulting in penalties or convictions for child labor. As in the past, labor inspectors were not authorized to conduct inspections in the informal sector, where child labor remained a problem, as responsibility for controlling the informal sector lies with police.

In September, the police began raids on known child labor locations in Paramaribo, including street spots where underage vendors worked, as well as nightclubs, casinos and brothels, in order to combat the problem.

Suriname Labor College and other unions subsidized by the Ministry of Labor conducted campaigns aimed at eliminating child labor in its worst forms in various districts of the country, including Nickerie, Paramaribo, and Marowijne; the campaign targeted public and private sector officials, school teachers, students, and caregivers.

e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

There was no legislation providing for a minimum wage. Including a cost of living allowance, the lowest wage for civil servants was approximately \$160 (SRD 427) per month, which did not provide a decent standard of living for a worker and family. Government employees, who constituted approximately 50 percent of the work force of 100,000 persons, frequently supplemented their salaries with second or third jobs, often in the informal sector. The President and Council of Ministers set and approved civil service wage increases.

Work in excess of 9 hours per day or 45 hours per week on a regular basis required special government permission, which was granted routinely. Such overtime work earned premium pay. The law requires one 24-hour rest period per week.

A 10- to 12-member inspectorate in the Occupational Health and Safety Division of the Ministry of Labor was responsible for enforcing occupational safety and health regulations. Resource constraints and lack of trained personnel precluded the division from making regular inspections. There was no law authorizing workers to refuse to work in circumstances they deem unsafe; they must appeal to the inspectorate to declare the workplace situation unsafe.